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The "Weak" Brother.

THINGS OFFERED TO IDOLS.

The exigency which had arisen in the churches of Corinth, and Rome, and Colosse, was this: according to the heathen systems of worship, it was customary to leave over night the generous offerings of devotees, at the foot of the images or idols they adored. As a matter of course, the wooden things never ate any portion of them, and the viands were too good and too valuable to be thrown away; so, in the morning, the meat and wine were taken into the public market-place, and sold for money. Some few persons raised the outcry that the purchase of these two articles of common use under such arrangements was wrong; for whoever lived upon what had once been consecrated to an idol, in an unmistakable sense worshiped the idol, and so betrayed his religious faith as a Christian. This opinion bore hard upon young believers in the church, for they were mostly poor in this world's goods, and such supply of wine and meat came cheaper than any other in the markets, and they were accustomed to buy it. It was not the discussion in those cities, whether it was right or wrong to eat meat or drink wine as articles of food; what these people kept agitating was the question whether it compromised their consistency to purchase and eat such offered meat or wine as had been used in idol worship.

Now please read carefully and notice the counsel, which Paul gives, takes new force from the fact that socially these fault finders gave constant offense. This difference of views was a provoking hindrance to all ease of fellowship. Many Christians felt the awkwardness of being so constantly watched and criticised. It must be carefully noticed, that these church members of Rome and Corinth, whoever they were, are not at all commended to us as being extraordinarily pious or charitable men. Those who are here described as conscientiously restricting their customs of eating or drinking, for fear they might compromise their consistency, are not, even in one instance, held up before their brethren as exemplary, or conspicuous for imitation. They are mentioned only three times, and always called "weak" people, and the appeal is made in their behalf, that they should be treated with sympathy and forbearance. "Take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to them that are weak." The "weak" brother of those early days has his antitype around us in these modern times. Brethren, let us strive to master our whims and crotchets and endeavor to be numbered amongst the strong, rather than the "weak."

The Celebrated Pliny Letter.

Pliny's Letter to Trajan written about forty years after Paul's Death; translated by Melmoth, 1797:

"It is a rule sir, which I invariably observe, to refer myself to you in all my doubts; for who is more capable of removing my scruples, or informing my ignorance? Having never been present at any trials concerning those persons called Christians, I am unacquainted not only with the nature of their crimes, or the measure of their punishment, but how far it is proper to enter into an examination concerning them. Whether, therefore, any difference is usually made with respect to the age of the guilty, or no distinction is to be observed between the young and the adults; whether repentance entitles them to a pardon; or if a man has been once a Christian, it avails nothing to desist from his error; whether the very profession of Christianity, unattended with any criminal act, or only the crimes themselves inherent in the profession are punishable; in all these points I am greatly doubtful. In the meanwhile the method I have observed toward those who have been brought before me as Christians, is this: I interrogate them whether they were Christians; if they confess, I repeated the question twice, adding threats at the same time; and if they still persevered, I ordered them to be immediately punished. For I was persuaded whatever the nature of their opinion might be, a contumacious and inflexible obstinacy certainly deserved correction.

There were others also brought before me possessed with the same infatuation, but, being citizens of Rome, I directed that they should be conveyed thither. But this crime spreading (as is usually the case) while it was actually under prosecution, several instances of the same nature occurred. An information was presented to me without any name subscribed, containing a charge against several persons. These upon examination denied that they were or ever had been Christians. They repeated after me an invocation of the Gods, and offered religious rites with wine and frankincense before your statue, (which for that purpose I had ordered to be brought together with those of the Gods,) and even reviled the name of Christ; whereas there is no forcing, it is said, those who are really Christians into any of these compliances. I thought it proper, therefore, to discharge them. Some among those who were accused by a witness in person, at first confessed themselves Christians, but immediately after denied it; the rest owned indeed they had been of that number, formerly, but had now (some above three others more, and a few above twenty years ago,) renounced the error. They all worshiped your statue and the images of the Gods, uttering imprecations at the same time against the name of Christ. They affirmed the whole of their guilt, or their error was that they met on a certain stated day, before it was light, and addressed themselves in the form of prayer to Christ, as to some God, binding themselves by a solemn oath, not for the purpose of any wicked design, but never to commit any fraud, theft or adultery; never to falsify their word, nor deny a trust, when they should be called upon to deliver it; after which it was their custom to separate, then reassemble, to eat in common a harmless meal. From this custom, however, they desisted after the publication of my edict, by which, according to your commands, I forbade the meeting of any assemblies. In consequence of this, their declaration I judged it the more necessary to endeavor to extort the real truth, by putting two female slaves to the torture, who were said to officiate in their religious functions: but all I could discover, was that these people were actuated by an absurd and excessive superstition. I deemed it expedient therefore, to adjorun all further proceedings in order to consult you. For it appears to be a matter highly deserving your consideration; more especially as great numbers must be involved in the danger of these persecutions, which have already extended, and are still likely to extend, to persons of all ranks and ages, and even of both sexes. In fact this contageous superstition is not confined to the cities only, but has spread its infection among neighboring villages and country. Nevertheless it still seems possible to restrain its progress. The temples at least, which were once almost deserted begin now to be frequented, and the sacred solemnities, after a long intermission are revived; to which I must add, there is again also a general demand for the victims, which for some time past had met with but few purchasers. From the circumstances I have mentioned, it is easy to conjecture what number might be reclaimed if a general pardon were granted to those who shall repent of their error.

Is it really "Innocent?"

A thing is innocent which produces no injury. In this view of innocency, can we really claim that alcoholic beverages are innocent? We are willing to admit that there are some persons who can use alcoholic beverages without producing that injurious effect called drunkenness. Not every man who drinks a glass of wine becomes a sot. But we should carefully bear in mind that a glass of alcoholic wine is not "innocent" in the same sense that a glass of milk is, or a glass of water. They have no tendency to inflame appetite, or to disorder the brain, or to poison the blood, or to get deadly mastery over both body and soul.

Now much is said now-a-days about total abstinence for the sake of others, and it is often said that intoxicating liquors are innocent in themselves. Let us see. No one feels called upon to deny himself milk or water or coffee for the sake of his neighbor. It is just because alcoholic beverages contain in themselves these qualities of inflaming appetite, and disordering the brain, and destroying the reason, that they are dangerous. Surely no beverage which, according to God's holy Word and common observation, contains in itself a "serpent" and a "viper" can strictly and honestly be called innocent. It may not overcome everybody who tampers with it, but the very fact that it contains these endangering qualities, and the additional fact that it has slain its millions upon millions in time and eternity, puts it under a ban. If the alcoholic glass did not contain these qualities, how could it make any weak brother "stumble," and why should I be asked to give it up for that brother's sake? This whole argument for total abstinence, on the ground of expediency, rests on one still deeper down, and that is the inherent danger of all intoxicating drinks. None of us liveth to himself alone. Our influence is as inseparable from us as is our shadow on a sushiny day.

Lording it Over the Possessions.

The Primitive Church was in some respects a business man. Many of the organizations held property the same as individuals now do, and it was improved for the benefit of the church. At times greedy men would endeavor to appropriate the proceeds of such property to their own selfish interests. This is what is meant where lording it over God's heritage is condemned.

The Apostolic church, at Jerusalem possessed considerable wealth. The disciples sold their possessions and laid the price thereof at the Apostle's feet, and they had all things common, and such churches had possessions.

It would not seem advisable to adopt this system now, in its entirety, but churches should be possessors, even though there may be some danger of individuals attempting to Lord it over the possessions.

A church should possess enough property in common, that the proceeds would about or altogether pay the actual necessary expenses. A farm, in the country, and rentable property in cities should comprise a part of the possessions of the church and then when a little depression in business passes over the country, the revenues of the church would not be altogether dependent upon the good graces of "hard up" people. Again the church should be a life insurance company; not to pay so much money because a member dies, but to feed, cloth and educate the orphans, support the widows, take care of the sick and afflicted. The reason why people are now so afraid to give the church a nickle, is, because it is looked upon as a poor beggar that takes all it can get and never returns any thing back under any circumstances. People will pay from ten to one hundred dollars per year to a life insurance company from ten to fifty years, because there is a promise of a return of a stipulated sum at death that may be needed by dependent ones. Why should there not be such confidence placed in the church?

People seem to have an awful horror against being dependent upon the world for daily bread, and many are willing to do almost anything to satisfy their minds that they are perfectly sure of having what they need while they remain in the world. Why should not the church afford the strongest security of this character, and cause to exist among its members a feeling of confidence that if they once are no longer able to provide for themselves, the church would? How often sisters lament when their husbands are sick, not only for fear that the bonds of love will be broken, but that their support may be taken away! Why should they not be made to feel that God—the church—will support them wherein there is necessity? These things ought not to be this way. There should be no occasion for the so-called benevolent or secret societies. The church should, and where it fills its measure, does cover every commendable feature that can be found in any such association.

Oh for a church that fills the full measure, in all things, of the church of Jesus Christ.

EDITORIAL ITEMS.

Our young brother Hilderbrand will fill brother Mason's appointments at Farmersville, Winchester and Lexington on Sunday, May 8th.

The committee of arrangements for the coming Sunday School Convention at Bear Creek, 6 miles west of Dayton, O., intend to arrange so that the exercises can be held in a grove close to the church.

An effort will be made to have reduced rates to the S. S. Convention. Since the Inter-state Commerce law is now in force, of course we are unable to say at present whether we will succeed or not.

Wooster University, which is located about twenty-five miles from Ashland, has received a bequest of $25,000. If Ashland College should be thus favored, it would not be long, until an improved state of affairs would exist on College Hill.

So long as religion does not interfere with the plans, passions, appetites and money making of bad men, they are disposed to let it alone, as "none of their business." But let it interfere with liquor selling and liquor drinking, let the preaching of the Gospel be the means of stopping the sale of vile books, and let it close lotteries, raffles and gambling hells, then there will be a terrible outcry against a system that will infringe on the "liberties" of a free people. This is a good thermometer by which we can guage Christian zeal. When persons of bad or questionable practice denounce the church, it is because their "craft" is in danger.

The brethren at Pleasant Hill, Miami Co., Ohio, will hold a communion service, Saturday evening, April 30th, There will be services Friday evening and Saturday afternoon previous.

We extend our sincere sympathies to Bro. Samuel Kiehl and family, in their bereavement. Sister Kiehl was one of the Lord's true children, and a crown awaits her.

Bro. P. J. Brown will favor the people of Canaan, Ohio, with his lecture on California. at the M. E. church, April 30th, at 7:30 p. m. Bro. J. B. Yoder of that village is making an effort to have a large audience, and we hope he may be successful.

Bro. J. W. Beer's views on the covering published elsewhere are very interesting. We commend a careful reading to all who are concerned about this subject. He has taken a high step in the proper direction.

The program of the Ohio S. S. Convention is published on the inside this week. Now let all the S. S. workers of the State prepare to go. It will be an interesting occasion. The location is four or five miles west of the National Military Home, and visitors can go to both places. The home is located on the road from Dayton to the Bear Creek church.

We publish the notable Pliny letter this week. It is valuable as a testimony in support of the love feast, and the modest outline of the manner of worship of Primitive Christians, coming as it does from a Pagan ruler, and was written as a legal document. It seems that the Christians he referred to held a love feast every first day of the week in the evening. This would now appear as a great burden, and it would be as they are now held